

Senator Jones, thank you again for calling a hearing on this important topic. I wish we could have found a date when I was available to speak on this topic in person. Having watched over this legislation for the past seven years, and that it bears my son's name, it is extremely important to me.

I have copied the clerk as well so she can forward to other members of the committee as I could not find direct emails online.

Sadly as you know, MI is one of the last five states with no anti-bullying legislation in our nation. We have enacted more laws and regulations over the past eight years to protect the rights of corporations and prisoners than looking for the care of our children.

In order for MI to prosper we must have a knowledge based economy.

The days of the "factory rat" are gone. We must be thinking forward, we must reduce truancy and drop out rates we must achieve higher test scores to compete globally. We can do neither if our children are afraid to go to school.

Bullying is the number one issue in schools today, because it has been ignored, misunderstood, and sadly "sanctioned" by adults who have not listened to countless experts over the years that if it is not addressed it will become a major problem, and it has. Our problems with cyberbullying are directly related to the attitude of "acceptance". That it is normal. We as a society were not caught "off guard" as many say. We as a society were lazy to respond.

State after state has passed versions of laws on anti-bullying but I will be the first to say it is not the be all save all. There is a lot of work to be done after the bill is passed, and I will be there to assist. Your version of the bill lacks some of the items in other bills but puts MI on the right path.

I would urge that there is nothing left to remove or change from this present law. It has already been through the shredder, please do not reduce this any further. There is no line or section that should be removed or changed, unless it is to strengthen , NOT weaken it.

Many will call for the removal of section:

(iii) Is reasonably perceived to be motivated by animus or by an actual or perceived characteristic.

Which I feel is the heart of the problem we have. People act out because of a trait they feel uncomfortable with. IT is bigotry in its base form. Also for those who feel that "Perceived Characteristic"

means "Gay" I will point out that the concept has been vetted with the people of Michigan in voting for a Governor whose campaign was based on the "perceived characteristic of being a "Nerd".

We must endeavor to increase the effectiveness of the law by looking at adding amendments to strengthen it and reject those that weaken it.

Items such as:

- 1) Requiring reporting of such incidents to the state Board of Ed and required reporting on yearly reports
- 2) Enhanced attention to cyberbullying no matter where it occurs.
Whatever happens off campus will certainly affect the campus community.
- 3) A requirement that all staff members and temporary staff members understand the severity of bullying and have tools for their use in combating such behavior.
- 4) Creation of a Michigan Anti-Bullying Task Force, a network made up of parents, educators, lawmakers, and law enforcement members dedicated to teaching, training and education on this topic across MI (

most of this already exists but can be made more formal to increase school involvement and assist MI with anticipated anti-bullying/violence funding from the White House)

Again I am sorry that I am not able to share these ideas with you in person but I feel strongly that if we do not rally beyond partisan, and personal lines we will continue to loose ground and lives on this issue. Since

2001 MI has lost 10 children to bullycide, including Taylor Smith whom we lost within the last month. Children who may still be with us if we as responsible adults, had responded earlier with anti-bullying legislation. Legislation which would have created increased awareness and prevention models for schools to use.

Respectfully yours.

Kevin Epling
Father of Matt Epling
Bullypolice USA
"Fight Bullying: Educate, Empower, Engage!"